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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000824

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/MARCHESE/HARDING

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: MARADA ALLY BLAMES HARIRI FOR SECURITY PROBLEMS

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

1. (C) Richard Haykel, AmCham Vice President, general manager of a Tripoli hospital, and close friend of Marada Forces leader Suleiman Franjeh, on May 31 theorized about the recent security incidents in the north. He blamed Hariri and the Future Movement for the existence of Fatah al-Islam and highlighted what he believes was Hariri's role in the current fighting in the north. Haykel believes Hariri was preparing extremist groups to fight on behalf of the Lebanese Sunni population in the event of a civil war. He believed more Fatah al-Islam suspects detained by the ISF were found dead while those in LAF custody were still alive, arguing that the ISF (believed to be a predominately Sunni force loyal to Hariri) killed the extremists to keep quiet any links to Hariri. He also wondered why security tapes from the looted bank had not been made public, suggesting the suspects had regularly collected their Hariri-paid salaries from the location. Additionally, Haykel asserted that the Marada Forces are not rearming or recruiting new members to their civil war-era militia. End Summary.

SUNNI SUPPORT BOLSTERS FAI

2. (C) On May 31, Richard Haykel, AmCham Vice President, general manager of Haykel Hospital in Tripoli, and close friend of opposition ally and Marada Forces leader Suleiman Franjeh, engaged in a "question and question" session with poloff regarding the presence of Sunni extremists in northern Lebanon. Haykel answered each of poloff's questions with a rhetorical question of his own. He believes Saad Hariri and the Future Movement supported the presence of Fatah al-Islam in northern Lebanon, although he worked to avoid explicitly saying so. He pointed to the heavy equipment Fatah al-Islam possesses in Nahr el-Barid as exhibit A. Contradicting March 14's claim of Fatah al-Islam as a Syrian proxy, Haykel assessed that the equipment could not have been smuggled across the Syrian border or purchased from Syrians within Lebanon. Such a move, he claimed, would have been "too obvious."

3. (C) According to Haykel, exhibit B for Hariri's support to Fatah al-Islam was the simultaneous pardon in 2005 by Hariri of Christian leader Samir Geagea and a group of Sunni extremists involved in the 2000 Dinneyyeh incident.
(COMMENT: On New Years Eve, 2000, Sunni extremists in

Dinneyyeh kidnapped and later killed one Army officer and four soldiers. In response, the LAF launched a massive assault against the town, killing or arresting suspected fighters. End Comment.) Haykel claimed that Hariri was supporting Sunni extremists now for the same reason the Sunnis had supported Palestinians during the civil war: to prepare the groups to act as proxy militias for the Sunni community if fighting erupts in Lebanon.

TYING IN CURRENT EVENTS

14. (C) Again posing pointed rhetorical questions, Haykel offered his opinion on the Tripoli bank robbery on May 19 that triggered the ISF raid of Fatah al-Islam safe houses and the group's subsequent attack against the LAF. He wondered why the surveillance tapes from the bank had not been investigated or made public. He opined that it would be important and useful to examine whether the suspected bank robbers had been previous customers of the same bank, to assess the suspects' motives or potentially to prove that the selection of the bank had been random. Haykel was, in his indirect way, suggesting that the robbers may have been receiving money regularly from the Tripoli bank. When their money source was cut-off -- which some oppositionists claim happened after the Ain Alaq bombings in February -- the suspects robbed the bank. Haykel later told embassy staff that the suspects stole only the exact amount of their salaries from the bank. When asked why the suspects' money source would have been terminated after the Ain Alaq incident, Haykel said possibly Fatah al-Islam had been too visible or the bombing had not been approved by their patrons (in this story, the Future Movement).

15. (C) Haykel queried why all Fatah al-Islam suspects who had

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encountered the Lebanese Internal Security Forces (ISF) -- a mainly Sunni force commonly seen as Saad Hariri's private militia -- were found dead, while those detained by the LAF were still alive. He argued the ISF had been directed to kill suspected Fatah al-Islam members to prevent them from revealing ties to the Future Movement. (COMMENT: We have heard this accusation leveled by the opposition but have seen no independent verification of ISF abuse of prisoners. The ISF is often criticized as a less professional force than the LAF, suggesting such differing treatment of prisoners is possible, although potentially unrelated to the conspiracy motive mentioned above.) Haykel also questioned why Fatah al-Islam's Tripoli safe houses were located in such a nice area of the city, wondering who had sold or rented the space to the extremists. For once answering his own question, Haykel claimed Minister of Youth and Sports and Hariri-ally Ahmed Fatfat owns the building where the fighters were found.

FINDING A SOLUTION

16. (C) Haykel assessed that a comprehensive political solution was the only way to end the standoff between Fatah al-Islam and the LAF. Further, any political solution must have the buy-in of opposition figures. Haykel believed the LAF should remain deployed around Nahr el-Barid until politicians determined a final solution to the broader issues of Palestinians in Lebanon and a national unity government. There is "no other way," according to Haykel.

NO "EXTRA" PREPARATIONS FOR FIGHTING

17. (C) Despite rampant rumors of the rearming of civil war-era militias, Haykel denied that Franjieh's Marada Forces were seeking arms. Referring to the personal arms owned by most Lebanese, Haykel said Marada, in fact, already has all the weapons it would need if fighting broke out in Lebanon. Haykel claimed new recruitment was unnecessary because "we

know who's with us." He said the Marada Forces would rely on their civil war veterans in any renewed conflict. Haykel expressed little concern either that fighting would renew or regarding how the Marada would perform.

COMMENTS

18. (C) Haykel is clearly an ally of the opposition, or at least that of its Christian members, as his close relationship with March 8 member Sulieman Franjieh suggests. Additionally, Haykel's position as manager of the Tripoli hospital where some LAF casualties have been taken affords him a unique viewpoint regarding the current fighting.
FELTMAN